

The beginning of Civil Registration in England on 1 July 1837 together with the first national census which recorded individual names in 1841 greatly simplifies how one searches for information about ancestors in England. Prior to 1837, it is necessary to use different search strategies. This class will provide information, tips and clues for searching prior to 1837.

BASIC SOURCES FOR PRE-1837 RESEARCH

The basic sources for pre-1837 research are

1. Church records of christening, marriage, and burial. These may come as parish registers, bishop's transcripts, or archdeacon's transcripts. They may in formats of original records, digitized or microform records, abstracts, transcripts, or indexes.
2. Probate records (wills, administrations, act books, estate duty records, etc.)
3. Church records other than parish registers (often lumped together as *parish chest records*). Poor law records are basic sources. Other parish chest records are listed below under other sources.
4. Military records (also apply after 1837) including army, navy, marines, artillery, engineers, militia, etc.
5. Land Tax Assessments (particularly from 1780-1832)

BASIC STRATEGIES

The basic strategy used to find a family is to interweave information from two or more basic record types, together strengthening conclusions drawn about a family. Information provided in one record leads to another. This usually involves searching all available records for the time period and place(s) relevant to the individual and family being sought.

1. Do your homework to find indexes and search indexes first
 - a. online indexes first (easiest access, most flexible searches)
 - b. Search printed indexes
 - c. Email record offices or private index holders
2. Keep a proper research log. See www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Research_Logs. Your log should include descriptions of what you did, what you found, what you didn't find, and notes about what you intend to do next (and why).
3. When you find something in a church record of christening, marriage, or burial, search every available recording of the event, including:
 - a. Parish register, bishop's transcript, AND archdeacon's transcript (some differences)
 - b. If marriage is by license, find the license allegation and bond (critical!)
 - c. If marriage is by banns, check the banns book (particularly after 1753) if readily available.
 - d. If burial, look for a monumental inscription (check national burial index, parish churchyard)
4. When you find something in a transcript, abstract, or index, always look at the source (exception: FamilySearch **submission after 1990**). It may have been misread and often omits some details.
5. Correct spelling (particularly of names) is a twentieth century concept. Don't exclude odd spellings.
6. Use online or database search options and strategies, including:
 - a. Start general and narrow down.
 - b. Try variant spellings; soundex, metaphone
 - c. Try surname only searches (use dates or places to narrow down if too common)
 - d. Try first name only searches (use other household members, dates, or places to focus in)
 - e. Search for other family members (particularly if name uncommon)
 - f. When using a date as a search parameter, use a range of years (at least three)
 - g. When using a place as a search parameter, don't be too specific unless you need to

- h. Use advanced search and read search tips on a website search page
 - i. Searching a single database almost always gives different results than searching “all” databases on the same website.
7. Find all the available records and all the available family members. If someone may have lived until the census was taken, try to find them in the census (see previous item on searching)
 8. Don’t restrict yourself to a single place. Start with the parish you believe they were in, but don’t rule out nearby parishes. First search parishes within ten miles which are not included in available indexes.
 9. **Christening strategies.** It is difficult to make the connection between a marriage and the parent’s christening. Nothing in the christening record says who the person is going to marry later in life. The most common error in British research is accepting the wrong christening as the ancestor. For this reason, you must
 - a. Try to prove the christening is the WRONG person before accepting it. Always check the burial records to see if the person you think was your ancestor didn’t die as a child.
 - b. Don’t accept the first christening in the right area in the right time period—continue searching until you see if there are other possibilities.
 - c. Try to marry off children to other people before accepting them as your ancestor (check for other marriages in the area which could be that person). If you have only one marriage, but two people of that same name getting married, you need to account for what happened to the other possible person of the same name before accepting one of the two.
 - d. Don’t overlook non-conformist records (see www.thegenealogist.co.uk for bmdregisters). Some families joined a non-conformist church but later returned to the Church of England.
 10. **Marriage strategies:**
 - a. Marriages usually occurred in the bride’s parish, which often was NOT the same as the grooms. If you have the children being christened in a specific parish, you may need to search nearby parishes for the marriage. Use indexes!
 - b. Don’t restrict your search for a marriage too much. Marriages after the birth of the first child were not uncommon.
 - c. Marriages may have taken place in the nearest market town (because relatives were already gathered for the market, so it would be convenient for all and better attended)
 - d. Marriages may have taken place in the cathedral church (considered prestigious).
 - e. Many christenings took places in chapelries, a short of dependent branch of parish. Chapelries were not allowed to perform marriages, so the marriage would be in the mother parish church.
 - f. Non-conformist faiths (except Quakers and Jews) could not perform marriages between 1754 and 1837—so even when the family was clearly another religion, the marriage would be in the Church of England.
 - g. Clandestine marriages are those which took place without an authorized minister. These were common before a law forbade such marriages from 1754 on. They were common in urban areas. More than half the marriages in London before 1754 were clandestine and may appear in Fleet marriages or other clandestine registers (or nowhere) – per John Titford.
 11. **Death or burial strategies:**
 - a. If the person lived after 1837, try <http://freebmd.rootsweb.com> to find death.
 - b. If the person lived after 1857, try Ancestry National Probate Index to find death (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1904>).
 - c. Try the National Burial Index (Cd-ROM, or fee-based site origins.net (see websites))
 - d. Married women will be buried under their married name. They may also have remarried after the death of their husband and thus be difficult to find in burial records.
 12. Learn about the place(s) and jurisdictions for that place (see <http://maps.familysearch.org>). Learn about the history of the place during the relevant time period for events that may have impacted records or population movement. Was the church a parish, a chapelry, or did it even exist as a church at the time your ancestor lived there?
 13. Use www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/England and www.genuki.org.uk to find information about the parish, the county, and the records of the area.
 14. If the family emigrated, examines sources in the destination country, including looking at neighbors, other family and congregation members, obituaries, headstones, death records, naturalizations, etc.

MAJOR ONLINE INDEXES AND RECORDS TO SEARCH

- FamilySearch – Historical Records (www.familysearch.org)
 - Millions of entries from parish registers and Bishops' Transcripts
- Other Internet Indexes
 - www.onlineparishclerks.org.uk
 - www.findmypast.co.uk \$ **
 - www.ancestry.com or www.ancestry.co.uk \$ (www.ancestryinstitution.com) **
 - www.thegenealogist.co.uk (includes BMDregisters.co.uk) \$ **
 - www.thenationalarchives.gov.uk (and www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/)
 - www.origins.net \$ **
 - www.freereg.org.uk
 - www.parishregister.com \$
 - www.genuki.org.uk

** Free at FHL and FamilySearch Centers

OTHER PRE-1837 SOURCES

Many other records exist for research prior to 1837. Most of these are not used unless you have information which indicates the possibility of success using one of these records. However, these sources should be considered for research once the basic sources have been covered.

1. Other parish chest records, including churchwarden accounts, enclosures, apprenticeships, vestry minutes, rate books, and miscellaneous other records
2. Court Records, especially Quarter Sessions records, but also Assize, Chancery, Wards & Liveries (wealthy minors), and various less common courts.
3. Occupational records (apprenticeships, livery companies or guilds)
4. Manor court records (poor and middle class)
5. Honourable East India Company (HEIC) records
6. School records (alumni books for universities date back to 1514)
7. Newspapers (British Newspaper Archive online – mostly upper middle class & gentry) and Gentleman's Magazine (see Wiki).
8. Visitations (upper middle class and gentry)
9. Biographies (Upper class, artists, inventors, other *notables*) see Wiki.
10. Protestation and Oath rolls (17th century)
11. Exchequer (especially tax records prior to 1600)
12. Property records (wealthy) including Inquisitions Post Mortem and Feet of Fines.
13. Directories (not common before 1800)

OTHER STRATEGIES

1. Always copy original records. The context matters, the handwriting matters, and something which seems unimportant may later turn out to be the needed clue (occupation, residence, etc.)
2. **Probate strategies** –
 - a. Use all indexes, including online, printed, and use act books as an index.
 - b. Consider searching all wills for the surname in the court. An uncle's, grandparent's or other relative's will might give the answer needed.
 - c. Consider searching all wills where the testator lived in the ancestor's parish. Sister's husbands and maternal relatives probably had a different surname. Even a non-relative's probate may solve your research problem.
3. Consider the possibility that some or all of the family emigrated or moved to another location. Look at emigration records and investigate events in another location if they are missing from where you expect them to be.

4. Use sites which match up researches working on the same individual, family, or surname in the same area. The best of these is www.genesreunited.com, but there's also RootsWeb Surname List and the Guild Of One Name Studies (GOONS).
5. Use others' research and the willingness of others to help you. These include
 - a. Sites where others offer to look things up for you, such as the England Lookup Exchange (<http://aztecrose.tripod.com/LookupExchange.htm>)
 - b. Sites with online trees which might include your family such as FamilySearch Family Tree (see www.familysearch.org/invite/public1) and Ancestry Trees.

EVALUATION

Use the following elements to evaluate information given in the record to put the right people in the right family:

- Read the record carefully.
- Interpret what the information says.
- Analyze what you already know and compare it with what you learn from reading the new record.
Always ask the following questions:
 - Is the information in the record consistent with what I already know? – If not, investigate why not
 - Does the information conflict with any information that I have? -- If not, investigate why
 - Is there new information provided in the record?
- Draw conclusions from that analysis.
 - Use all the information you have collected and ask, "What can I now conclude about this person or family?"
- Record your reasoning and document how you reached your conclusions (either in your source details or research log – or both). This will save you time!

HANDWRITING

Church records from the 1500's to the present day can have all different types of handwriting. There are online helps for handwriting:

- <http://familysearch.org/learningcenter/home.html>
- www.nationalarchives.gov.uk (Search box: type "Handwriting")

Books at the Family History Library

- N. Denholm-Young, *Handwriting in England and Wales* (FHL 652.1 D414h)
- John Barrett and David Iredale, *Discovering Old Handwriting* (FHL942 G3bj)
- Hilary Marshall *Palaeography for Family and Local Historians* (FHL 942 G37m)
- Frank Smith and David E. Gardner, *Genealogical Research in England and Wales*, v. 3 (FHL 929.142 G172g, v. 3)
- Frederick George Emmison, *How to read local archives, 1550-1700* (FHL 942 G3em)

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